

BRANDED FOR LIFE: SEX OFFENDER

LETTERS

from page 9

Dear Mr. Dodd,

I read the article in your paper about our sons. I am experiencing this first hand and do not agree with putting young boys in the same category as rapists and pedophiles.

They have to pay for what they thought was OK for the rest of their lives, watching over their shoulders every time they do anything.

A Concerned Mother, Texas

Dear Editor,

I applaud your article about the prosecution of teenagers for consensual sex and labeling them as "sex offenders."

I have been researching the issue for over a year now, mainly concentrating on treatment that is not only given to teens, but also to younger children for sex play or other non-violent behavior.

The techniques are based on those used on violent adult offenders, and are often similar to what was done to gay men decades ago.

Several psychological and juvenile justice researchers have objected to them, but they continue to be used.

I've assembled a tremendous amount of information at my Web site (www33.brinkster.com/ethical).

Again, thank you for informing your readers about part of this important issue.

Geoff Birky, Denton, MD

Dear Brenda,

Thank you for the recent article, "Branded for Life, Sex Offender."

I only hope that the exposure that you have given will serve to enlighten the general public. These archaic laws need to be reformed to protect these young men from the stigmatism that is associated as being labeled a sex offender for the rest of their lives because they had consensual sex with an underage girl.

Jamal, Concerned Father

Dear Mr. Dodd,

Thank you for the article about the fate of young men who engage in consensual sex with a minor. The public needs to know about the way our resources are being used in Texas.

My son is now 22 and has been on probation for two years and has five years to go for a consensual relationship with a girl he met on a church youth group trip his senior year in high school. She began calling him numerous times a day and inviting him over. He was 18 and she was 14 when they began dating.

They dated for almost a year with her parents' blessing. Her mother actually told him that she thought it was better for girls to date older guys and that she herself had dated a 24-year-old man when she was only 15.

My son had no previous sexual experience, but the girl did. My son had never really dated. He is hearing impaired and very immature. He thought that the worse thing that could

happen to him is that I would ground him if I found out her age and their sexual contact. (They did not have intercourse.)

She told me she was 16.

Well, he knows better now. He had to move out of our home because we have younger children, he cannot even come to visit us, spends holidays alone and is not allowed to even attend our church with us any more. And, he must attend weekly counseling with mostly older men who have done things with young children, pay monthly fines in addition to the weekly counseling fees and he must register as a sex offender for the rest of his life.

He has been treated for depression, dropped out of college because he could not even begin to concentrate with this on his mind and was placed on suicide watch for a short time while trying to come to grips with the situation.

As a mother, my heart breaks for him because I know my son is a good person and deserves a chance to prove so instead of facing a lifetime of registering as a sex offender.

In five more years, he will be off probation, and as the judge told him when he was given deferred adjudication, "Your record will not have a conviction," but that doesn't really matter when he must register for the rest of his life as a sex offender.

Thank you again for bringing this information to the public's attention.

J., Texas

Dear Don,

I just wanted to express my sincere gratitude for your taking on this issue and your willingness to print something totally against the sex offender hysteria.

You cannot possibly know what this article means to boys who are trapped in this situation. I heard from a mother recently whose son has just started probation. At his first visit with the probation officer, he was told he was in violation of his probation requirements because he lives at home with his mom and two younger brothers. They are 15 and 16. Either he had to move or his brothers had to move from their home. They have temporarily put him in a home that belongs to his grandmother, but there are some other issues with that. The thing that is so sad is that this boy has had to be basically abandoned even by his family to be in compliance with his requirements.

I brought The Examiner to work with me. One of my coworkers said she is going to call the school her son attends and tell them they need to read the article and if they pass out condoms, they need to tell the boys about the possible consequences.

Another one said she is going to call her ex-husband and tell him to read the article and then have a talk with their son.

I hope that it serves as a catalyst for change that will help all of these boys.

Thank you. I so appreciate you and your staff.

Tana Fillingame, Vidor

Dear Don,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to express our concerns regarding the criminal prosecution of teenagers engaging in consensual sex. This is such an emotionally charged issue that it is difficult to get people to hear anything beyond the words, "sex offender," when discussing it. Until it actually impacts your life, most people don't realize what the legal ramifications are.

We invite you and your readership to browse our Web site at <http://www.saveourson.com> where there are more than 20 stories and several news articles illustrating the life altering effects of these draconian laws. Changes need to be made to protect these young men's futures. If we do not, we will pay the consequences by destroying the futures of our best and brightest youth, as we take away their ability to make a meaningful contribution to their communities, their state and their county. Saving them will save the future of Texas.

Again, thank you. We will always be grateful for the time and effort your paper has given this important cause.

Founders of Save Our TexSONS

Dear Editor,

Thank you for getting the word out. It is very much appreciated. You have only scratched the surface of this subject and there are very many more horror stories related to this abuse of Texas law.

Thank you again for the article.

Trudy, Houston

Dear Mr. Dodd,

I am so glad this information has finally gotten out and that more people are starting to care.

E.W.

Dear Editor,

I would like to commend your paper for the article written by Brenda Cannon Stancil on February 24.

I live in Indianapolis, Indiana and belong to an organization called FACES (Families and Children Exploited Sexually). We have had children arrested and branded as sex offenders. Unlike Texas, our children are seldom added to the SOR. I am forwarding this story to The Indianapolis Star because our organization has been trying for some time to get them to write an article on this timely subject.

Boys as young as six are being arrested for doing the things our society has taught them are perfectly normal. When they are caught, they and their families begin a seemingly endless and excruciating journey. This expedition may include any or all of the following: All siblings being removed from the home by CPS, probation, family bankruptcy, outpatient sex offender therapy and the worst punishment — confinement in an institution for juvenile sex offenders. These kids are abused mentally, physically and emotionally.

There are eleven institutions in Indiana that have a juvenile sex offender program that I am aware of. Oddly enough, the largest one, Resolute, is run by someone from Texas. I hope your state is not serving as a training ground for this kind of child abuse.

Thanks again for having the courage to bring this to the public. I look forward to reading the next issue.

Janet, Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Brenda,

First of all, I love reading The Examiner.

Secondly, I am so thankful for the article in this week's paper titled, "Jail-bait."

My stepson has recently been charged with "aggravated assault to a minor."

This was clearly teenage consensual sex. Our family is now horrified of our judicial system.

He has been sentenced to eight years probation and branded a sex offender. He even had to move out of his home because he has two siblings under the age of 18. He cannot even live with his father due to the fact that we live within 1,000 feet of a school.

I truly hope that with this kind of publication and lots of emails to our officials, we can make a difference and change these laws.

Debra, Beaumont

Dear Mr. Dodd,

My sister got a hold of the article on sex offenders yesterday and I read it with disgust.

This is a nationwide epidemic that has been going on for centuries. Teen sex.

Here in Michigan where I live, I can say it seems the punishment is a little less than in Texas, but still harsh. Our listing or the sex offender registry is 25 years, with few exceptions, and pretty much the same in informing jobs, schools and local police departments where you live that you are a sex offender.

The same incidence happened with my nephew. There was no intercourse involved. The girl stalked him. She, of course, lied about her age and oral sex was eventually involved.

My nephew was 19, she looked 16-17, but was three months from her twelfth birthday. Curtis was given two counts of felony criminal sexual assault. One was for her touching him, one for him touching her. He had a great job, new car and was raised with religious morals and never had actual intercourse.

This May celebrates his fourth year in a correctional facility. Prison. The judge didn't want to sentence him. He had no choice but to plead no contest so the judge and the prosecutor agreed on the very minimal time of 4 - 8 1/2 years. He comes up for parole August 15, 2005.

He cannot come home. He cannot live with either of my brothers. One has

children, part time at home, the other lives a quarter of a mile from an elementary school. If he goes to college, he has to inform college staff that he is a sex offender, and any city he lives in, the police need to be notified.

There are more complications. No one ever talks about what these kids go through mentally not truly understanding what they did so wrong. Innocent exploration gets more time and attention than murder or real rape.

The girl was a troubled child and had no clue Curtis went to prison. She admitted she loved him, filed two false police reports because she did not want to get him in trouble, and no recourse, or therapy, or anything else was given to her. She admitted in court that she watched him with binoculars.

These young men ... kids ... are our future. This is the generation who will be taking care of us. They cannot vote now, or do any public service job ... they cannot teach school ... or take their own kids to playgrounds. They are truly branded like cows.

My nephew will be 48 when he is off the sex offender registry. How will he be able to lead a normal life after all this? How can these lawmakers and prosecutors live with themselves?

Michigan has their own coalition that is trying to amend laws and make new ones. But, when will it ever be good enough to protect our community...while protecting our children?

Lawmakers need to step up, stand up for these kids. Take their lot to a good place. Set up a separate branch that will actually review each case of teen sex and determine what time is needed for punishment and if it was actually a crime.

I am 36. When I was young, my friend started having sex at 11. Some started at 13. My first time, I was 16, and it was all against the law. But there was no A-Team looking for a fight. It was a parental responsibility, not a judicial one.

Jackie Doughten, Michigan

Dear Brenda,

Good morning. I was reading your articles in The Examiner, but especially the one, "Branded for Life, Sex Offender." I want to print this article for distribution to others.

I also want to congratulate you for tackling this subject. If there ever was a case where the law, as it is written, is absolutely totally misguided, then this is it. I sincerely hope this effort has some influence in getting the law changed in this case.

Many, many people realize that this is a very dangerous trap for lots of good young men.

I have a reason for wanting to print this article and will follow your subsequent articles on this subject as well.

Keep up the good work!

Joe, Kountze

See LETTERS on page 11